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THE INSTITUTIONAL PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES AND ITS IMPACT ON CURRENT NATIONAL SECURITY STRUCTURES

by

Gerardo Javier de la Cruz Martinez, Capt, USAF

Master of Arts in Latin American Studies

The University of Arizona, 1994

The modern Colombian military is a complex and dynamic organization. It has been able to adhere to the principles of respect for civilian authorities while at the same time been involved in a 30-year counterguerrilla struggle, increasing counternarcotics operations, and struggling with internal conflicts such as corruption and paramilitarism.

This thesis analyzes Colombian military professionalism in terms of the relationship between the military hierarchy and the civilian authorities, in conjunction with the military's operational expertise and capabilities reflected by military doctrine, definition of threats, and organizational structure. The armed forces professionalization process was influenced by persistent political violence, foreign ideologies, historic lack of interest by civilian authorities on national security matters, but above all, by a dynamic threat definition and assessment by the military hierarchy and the civilian executive.

Finally, this study also examines the impact of the professionalization process on bilateral military relations between the U.S. and Colombian armed forces.

This thesis comprises 105 pages (bibliography included), and utilized a conglomeration of primary sources such as Revista de las Fuerzas Armadas, Fuerzas Armadas, articles in Colombian newspapers, and interviews with Colombian military personnel; as well as secondary sources such as the Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook, Colombia: A Country Study, and a wide variety of Colombian, unpublished papers, journal articles, and presentations.

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by

Gerardo Javier de la Cruz Martinez

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the

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This thesis has been approved on the date shown below:

Paul G. Buchanan

Paul G. Buchanan
Assistant Professor of Political Science

DEC 0 8 1994
Date

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DEDICATION

To my wife and children. I would not have survived the last two years in the desert heat without your understanding, patience, company, and love.

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ABSTRACT

The modern Colombian military is a complex and dynamic organization. It has been able to adhere to the principles of respect for civilian authorities while at the same time been involved in a 30-year counterguerrilla struggle, increasing counternarcotics operations, and struggling with internal conflicts such as corruption and paramilitarism.

This thesis analyzes Colombian military professionalism in terms of the relationship between the military hierarchy and the civilian authorities, in conjunction with the military's operational expertise and capabilities reflected by military doctrine, definition of threats, and organizational structure. The armed forces professionalization process was influenced by persistent political violence, foreign ideologies, historic lack of interest by civilian authorities on national security matters, but above all, by a dynamic threat definition and assessment by the military hierarchy and the civilian executive.

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THE INSTITUTIONAL PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE COLOMBIAN ARMED FORCES AND ITS IMPACT ON CURRENT NATIONAL SECURITY STRUCTURES

Colombia has one of the most relatively stable, procedural democratic cultures in contemporary Latin America. This country has enjoyed more than 35 years of successive governments selected through open "competitive" elections. This apparent democratic success in a region where military coups were frequent has been affected by severe violence, primarily political in nature, arising from conflicts between the two traditional parties, increasing guerrilla activity, and, more recently, compounded by vicious and corrupting narcotrafficking. This political violence, epitomized by a decade of civil war popularly known as *La Violencia* (1948-1958), in which 100,000 to 300,000 people died, had a profound effect on modern Colombian politics, government structure, and civil-military relations. As a result of the high levels of political violence and of its subsequent involvement, the Colombian military has developed an extremely important role in Colombian politics and in all aspects of every day life.

The role of the military has by no means been static. On the contrary, it has evolved over time as perceived or real threats to the state and the military institution developed, changed, or waned. Efforts to "professionalize" the military

into an apolitical institution have been hindered by the military's corporate ideology, perceived levels of threat, and the inability of the government to deal with the extreme social and economic inequalities present in the Colombian society. But more recent events have turned the tide towards a Colombian military which is increasingly "well-trained, and as professional as it has ever been, especially in counter-insurgency tactics."[1]

Although the Colombian armed forces cannot be considered to be a classic Western democratic, professional military force, increasing similarities are evident.[2] As an institution, the Colombian military, has developed into a cohesive force with a strong ideology within the Colombian power structure, guided by a strong sense of nationalism. Yet, as opposed to praetorian militaries[3], which are prone to

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[1]Robert H. Dix, The Politics of Colombia (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1987), p. 138.

[2]See Morris Janowitz, Military Institutions and Coercion in the Developing Nations, 2ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 188, for a full explanation of the democratic model of civil-military relations. Also, see Samuel P. Huntington, The Soldier and the State (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957). Huntington describes the western professional soldier in terms of expertise, responsibility to society, corporateness, and canons of ethic. In his view, the professional military is subordinated to civilian authority and is to be used as an instrument of policy.

[3]According to Eric Nordlinger, Soldiers in Politics: Military Coups and Governments (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 2, praetorianism "refers to a situation in which military officers are major or predominant political actors by virtue of

direct intervention in politics, the Colombian military institution possesses a corporate belief in the principle of subordination to civilian authority. The essence of this military professionalism stems from the Military Reform Act of 1907, which is based on Prussian Doctrine, and was reinforced by a Chilean training mission between 1907 and 1915.

As one of the most important and strategic U.S. allies in Latin America, Colombia is an extremely important actor in the formulation of hemispheric security. An understanding of Colombian national security structures and their relation to Colombian political and social power centers is essential for a well-founded U.S. foreign and military policy that deals with concepts of regional economic and military defense as well as with the multilateral ramifications of narcotrafficking. This study analyzes Colombian military professionalism in terms of the relationship between the military hierarchy and the civilian authority, in conjunction with the military's tactical expertise and capabilities reflected by military doctrine, definition of threats, and organizational structure. This analysis will shed light on the problems of bilateral security relations between the U.S. and Colombian

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their actual or threatened use of force" in response to social preconditions such as deep internal cleavages, weakness of political parties, or the collapse of the executive.

governments by underscoring the participation of the Colombian military in political, social, and developmental initiatives while concurrently dealing with the often blurred threats against the existing regime.

CHAPTER 1

VIOLENCE, PROFESSIONALISM, AND THE NATIONAL FRONT: EFFECTS OF *LA VIOLENCIA*

Modern Colombia has a long history of political violence rising from the rivalry between the two traditional parties, the Conservatives and the Liberals. As opposed to most Latin American and Third World countries, the Colombian population has developed more party identity than class identity. Violence started to emerge after the national election of 1946, when Mariano Ospina Pérez was elected the first conservative president since 1934. The conservative government began to repress factions and supporters of the Liberal Party, just as the liberals did during the initial years of the "Liberal Republic" (1934-1946). Exact dates for *La Violencia* are imprecise, but the assassination of Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948 is widely regarded as the precipitating factor of the undeclared civil war.

Jorge Eliécer Gaitán was a populist "liberal dissident, with a reformist political platform and had important electoral support in the working classes, especially in Bogotá."[4] He was one of two liberals running for president in 1946, and was the popular favorite for the 1950 presidential

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[4]Paul Oquist, Violencia, Conflicto y Política en Colombia. (Bogotá: Talleres Gráficos Banco Popular, 1978), p. 15.

election. On April 9, 1948, news of his assassination spread rapidly across Bogotá and surrounding areas. Liberals stormed the streets of the capital in rage, looting and destroying everything that symbolized conservative power structures, in what is commonly known as the *Bogotazo*. The police, divided by party alliances, "did not confront the rebel forces and, in numerous occasions, joined the ranks and distributed arms to the mobs."[5] The army was able to establish order in the capital by using local forces and reinforcements.

The assassination of Gaitán served as a precipitating factor for widespread bursts of violence across the country. Violence quickly spread to the rural areas and liberal guerrilla groups rapidly emerged. Weak police forces could not control this rural violence, and in many instances, the police supported "small coups in the rural areas by arresting local conservative leaders."[6]

It is necessary to understand the role of the military during this bloody period in order to understand current civil-military relations. As in the rest of Colombian society and its institutions, there was an inherent bipartidism in the armed forces. This "party rivalry and favoritism in the repressive state apparatus became the government's limiting

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[5]Ibid., p. 234.

[6]Ibid., p. 258.

factor for the consolidation of its position."[7] The armed forces were historically under conservative control, but many "high-ranking officers feared that party conflict could destroy the military institution's unity."[8] After establishing order in Bogotá on April 9, the military asked President Ospina Pérez to resign, but did not overthrow the government. After this, the military initially remained neutral in the conflict, and consequently, gave tacit approval to "peace guerrillas" and conservative paramilitary groups to use terror in urban and rural areas.[9] During these initial phases of *La Violencia*, army factions sided, aided, or ignored groups of armed liberals or conservatives. A year later a liberal faction in the army tried to oust the government, but failed to gain institutional support. This proved that there were deep cleavages within the military (as in society in general), but it also demonstrated that the armed forces feared that such a coup could destroy its institutional integrity and took steps to prevent is from happening.

In 1950, under the new administration of conservative President Laureano Gómez (elected without opposition from the

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[7]Ibid., p. 257.

[8]Ibid., p. 260.

[9]Gonzalo Bermúdez Rossi, El Poder Militar en Colombia: De la Colonia al Frente Nacional (Bogotá: Ediciones Expresión, 1982), p. 68.

Liberal Party), Colombia sent a military expedition to the Korean Peninsula as part of the United Nations campaign against North Korea. The primary goals of this expedition were to professionalize the armed forces and to gain valuable combat experience. For their part, the returning troops developed the concept of the "communist enemy" which influenced the military view of domestic violence and defined military doctrine in Cold War terms.[10]

After a heart attack, President Gómez took a year and a half leave of absence in 1951 and tried to return to power on June 13, 1953. By this time, all political parties, the Church, and the military viewed *La Violencia* as a devastating force of national magnitude, and the return of Gómez was looked upon with disdain. On that same day, General Gustavo Rojas Pinilla, Commander of the Armed Forces, occupied the Presidential Palace, and took control of the government as the first and only military dictator of the century.[11] General Rojas Pinilla came to power "promising to end the violence and with the support from all major factions of the two

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[10]See Alvaro Valencia Tovar, Historia de las Fuerzas Militares de Colombia, 6 vols. (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, 1993), vol. 3: Ejército, for details on the efforts of the Colombia Battalion in the Korean Peninsula.

[11]See Antonio Alvarez Restrepo, Los Golpes de Estado en Colombia (Bogotá: Litografía Arco, 1982), pp. 187-188, for details on the military coup of 1953.

traditional parties, except the Gómez Conservatives."[12] During his dictatorship, he "carried out a good deal of economic infrastructure improvements," but "he began to show signs of wanting to continue in power and grew increasingly repressive."[13]

He declared a general amnesty for all armed groups, but this amnesty did not apply to the Communist Party, which was banned. Immediately, levels of partisan and unofficial violence decreased dramatically as groups laid down their arms or faced severe repression by military forces. Though the military regime believed that *La Violencia* was coming to an end, its plans crumbled rapidly. The military government lacked solid ideological convictions and could not consolidate a mass base of support. Consequently, violence re-emerged in the rural sectors and Rojas Pinilla was removed from power and replaced by a military junta on May 10, 1957.

Meanwhile, liberal and conservative leaders joined efforts to eradicate violence and re-establish order. The bilateral pact between the Conservative and Liberal Parties, known as National Front, was ratified by a national plebiscite. The National Front was a legal mechanism designed

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[12]Harvey F. Kline, "Colombia: Modified Two-Party and Elitist Politics," in Latin American Politics and Development, 2ed., Howard J. Wiarda and Harvey F. Kline (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1985), p. 257.

[13]Ibid.

to divide power equally between the Liberals and Conservatives, by alternating the presidency until 1974 and providing for parity within the legislative bodies in order to stop the political violence and the struggle for power.[14] In 1958, liberal leader Alberto Lleras Camargo was elected the first president of the National Front. Although violence was not completely eliminated, the implementation of the National Front is generally regarded as signaling the end of *La Violencia*.

Several trends during *La Violencia*, including the nature of General Rojas Pinilla's regime, provide useful insights on present civil-military relations in Colombia. First, there was a fundamental change dealing with the roles of the National Police (to control the internal public order) and the armed forces (to protect the national borders, and, in exceptional cases, to provide internal repression).[15] The military began to regard its mission as establishing internal order against Soviet-inspired subversion instead of guarding against external threats.

Second, while in the initial phases of *La Violencia* the military was fairly inactive or disinterested, its new "corporate mission" censured this inactivity and persuaded the

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[14]See Oquist, p. 18, for specific terms of the National Front.

[15]Gustavo Gallón Giraldo, La República de las Armas (Bogotá: Editorial Presencia, 1983), p. 16.

armed forces to take a more active role in politics and in internal population control to guard against communist subversion.

Third, during the Rojas Pinilla's government, the military did not establish a political ruling party, although the armed forces "internalized the experience of being considered an important sector in the government."[16]

Fourth, there was increased militarization of the Colombian state. During *La Violencia*, the number of military mayors in civilian townships rose, and this number grew even more under the Pinilla's dictatorship.[17] Fifth, specific patterns were followed to deal with the growing subversive threat by liberal guerrillas in rural areas. Conservative *latifundistas* used police and army personnel to expel middle and small landowners from the rural areas. In response to these actions and the emergence of army-sponsored paramilitary groups, liberal supporters responded by creating fronts of guerrilla activity.[18] The increase in guerrilla activity was considered a threat to the state and to the military institution, and consequentially, led to an increase in military operations and repression, thus manifesting the

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[16]Ibid., p. 21.

[17]Ibid., pp. 26-27.

[18]Bermúdez Rossi, pp. 67-68.

conservative nature of the army.

The Colombian military started to slowly acquire more political power through the National Front in the 1960s. The National Front ensured that the Armed Forces "conserve and extend a rightful position in the decision-making apparatus of the State."[19] The political exclusion of smaller opposition parties in the National Front increased military autonomy by reducing civilian oversight, and the "armed forces had to be unavoidably incorporated into the new administrative structure."[20] The Ministry of National Defense (formerly the Ministry of War) became part of the military forces "patrimony" within the National Front, as it was necessary for an apolitical military officer to occupy the position to ensure parity in a 13-member cabinet.

During the 1960s, the Colombian military followed the "**National Defense**" concept as the exclusive function of the armed forces. This concept places emphasis on physical defense of the state institutions. As subversion was perceived as the primary threat against the state, army operations tended to concentrate on internal security. A Superior Council of National Defense, composed of both civilian and military ministers (similar to the U.S. National

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[19]Gallón Giraldo, p. 12.

[20]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

Security Council), was created in 1960 to provide the executive with advice concerning matters of national defense.[21] A new Administrative Security Department (DAS) was set up "to organise intelligence gathering for the counter-insurgency effort."[22] A Civil Defense system was organized in 1965 to respond to natural disasters, but members also provided a reserve force for the Armed Forces and became a complicated net of informers. In 1967, a National Intelligence Junta was created to "centralize all interior espionage activities."[23]

Because of its new internal orientation, the military organizational structure was also modified during this decade. In 1965, the National Police was subordinated to the military under the Ministry of Defense. This was followed by the subordination of the different branches of the Armed Forces (Air Force and Navy) to the Army.

The military expanded its involvement in Colombian society during the 1960s through a variety of means: combinations of civic-action activities, where the military conducted rural development projects designed to win the "hearts and minds" of the population (a form of psychological

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[21]Ibid., p. 13; and p. 36 for the composition of the National Defense Superior Council.

[22]Jenny Pearce, Colombia: Inside the Labyrinth (Nottingham, Great Britain: Russell Press, 1990), p. 63.

[23]Gallón Giraldo, p. 37.

warfare); military and propaganda campaigns; and the militarization of "independent republics."[24] One of the most important operations was the *Plan Lazo* of 1964. It combined civic-action activities, propaganda distribution, and a direct encirclement of guerrilla groups situated in the "insurgent-influenced" territory of Marquetalia. Rebels who managed to escape the encirclement joined after the operation and formed the *Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia* (FARC), which became the largest guerrilla movement in the country.

Another operation, *Plan Andes* (1968-1970), was carried out in cooperation with the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Colombian Agrarian Reform Institute (INCORA). Its goal was to "eradicate subversion," and it contained a number of developmental as well as repressive measures."[25] This plan did not survive for long because it was declared unconstitutional by the courts. The militarization of rural areas continued through an increase in military mayors in townships and the requirement for governors to coordinate with military

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[24]"Independent republics" were communist guerrilla-controlled territories that had independent "governments" within Colombia's national boundaries. During and after *La Violencia*, groups of liberal guerrillas began to internalize communism as a counter-hegemonic ideology, and consequentially developed into communist-oriented revolutionary movements. Initially, these movements received Cuban and Soviet support. As this support diminished during the 1970s, these movements began to rely on kidnapping and extorsion for financial self-support.

[25]Pearce, p. 203.

commanders when dealing with security and developmental policies. Finally, the role of the military in society increased even more under Executive Decree 1290 of May 21, 1965, which gave the military jurisdiction over civilians to be tried in military courts. This decree created tension among the Department of Justice, the executive, and the military legal system.[26]

While the 1960s were characterized by a "**National Defense**" strategy, the 1970s saw the emergence of the "**National Security**" concept in Colombia's civil-military relations. Jenny Pearce considers that by the 1970s, "the military already had considerable administrative autonomy from the state and had become less dependent on the traditional parties for its political orientation," but nevertheless, "ideological differences were growing."[27]

To overcome its ideological weaknesses, the military institution started to consolidate its ideological convictions and adapted them into the National Security Doctrine. Based on the National Security Doctrine of Southern Cone countries, the Colombian doctrine "was less an ideology for government than an ideological support for their war against communism."[28]

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[26]Gallón Giraldo, pp. 27-28.

[27]Pearce, p. 203.

[28]Ibid., p. 204.

The doctrine forces the military "to identify the interests, objectives, and policies of the country... and to organize and discipline national life, and society as a whole, in a fashion conducive to satisfy those requirements."[29] The *Escuela Nacional de Guerra*, fashioned after the Brazilian Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG), became a forum for discussion and a laboratory for the formulation of national policies, but never reached the same level of significance and influence as its Brazilian counterpart.

The Colombian military had a major victory in 1974 when President Alfonso López Michelsen (1974-1978) issued Decree 1573 in which the National Security Doctrine was officially recognized. Unlike in the Southern Cone where the National Security Doctrine was applied through specific programs and policies of the military regimes, the Colombian state recognized the doctrine through an official executive decree. This decree created five "Power Fronts" designed to deal with Colombia's military and socio-economic problems, and "each one [was] directed by a cabinet minister."[30] The military immediately began a program to disseminate the doctrine to

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[29]Edgar Caicedo, Militares y Militarismo (Bogotá: Editorial Colombia Nueva, 1989), p. 219.

[30]Gallón Giraldo, pp. 68-69. The following is a list of the "Power Fronts" and the corresponding ministries: (1) Internal Front, Government; (2) External Front, Foreign Relations; (3) Economic Front, Treasury and Public Credit; (4) Military Front, National Defense; and (5) Technical-Scientific, National Education.

different echelons of society. These efforts included information courses about "national security" for private and public executives; military promotion for executives remaining in the reserve force; incorporation of professionals into the armed forces; and obligatory military service.[31] With these programs, the military was able to expand its sphere of influence in civilian sectors and to consolidate its position as a leading actor of the state.

Following the implementation of the five "Power Fronts," there was an increase in repression against the guerrilla movements during the administration of President Julio César Turbay Ayala (1978-1982) and his Minister of Defense, General Luis Carlos Camacho Leyva. President Turbay Ayala decreed in 1978, "that whole sections of the nation were subject to 'militarization' and directed [the] armed forces to weed out guerrillas. The military could determine all law for these regions: legal jurisdictions, freedom of movement, and curfews."[32] Moreover, there was a re-emergence of private armies, death squads, and paramilitary organizations, most of which had alleged contacts with military personnel.

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[31]Ibid., pp. 75-80.

[32]Cynthia A. Watson, "Political Violence in Colombia: Another Argentina?" Third World Quarterly 12 (July 1990): 27.

CHAPTER 2

1982-1986: BETANCUR AND MILITARY AUTONOMY

The military continued during the late 1970s and early 1980s with the same levels of repression established by General Camacho Leyva against leftist revolutionary movements. This repression was primarily justified by the actions of a highly visible revolutionary group, the April 19 Movement (M-19). In 1979, the M-19 stole more than 5,000 arms from the *Cantón Norte*, one of the army's largest armories. The military considered this a direct attack against its institution and responded with full force. After a few months, most of the arms were recovered and hundreds of M-19 operatives and sympathizers were apprehended. The captured M-19 leaders were tried in military courts and imprisoned in military jails.

The repressive policies continued until the election of Belisario Betancur Cuartas as President of the Republic. The objectives of the new administration were to continue the national dialogue for peace with subversive movements introduced by President Turbay during his last year in office, initiate political reform, declare a general amnesty, create a Peace Commission, and organize a National Plan for

Rehabilitation for economic reform.[33] Betancur believed in a political solution for the guerrilla problem, which had steadily grown through the years.[34] Therefore, President Betancur declared a partial amnesty in 1982, which the military initially opposed. Based on the concept of mutual understanding and national dialogue, Betancur's peace initiatives were received with hopes and skepticism by the military and public alike.[35]

The main source of conflict between Betancur's efforts for peace and the armed forces arose from the fact that the military was not allowed to actively participate in the summits with the guerrilla groups. According to the military, the talks and the amnesty only restrained the armed forces and gave guerrillas room to expand and maneuver.[36] Nevertheless,

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[33]See Elsa Blair Trujillo, Las Fuerzas Armadas: Una Mirada Civil (Bogotá: Centro de Investigación y Educación Popular (CINEP), 1993), pp. 139-153.

[34]According to Terrorism Class: Colombia, [ca. 1990], provided by James Sutton, Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993, "there are some 12,000 to 15,000 guerrilla combatants currently active in Colombia" belonging to ten guerrilla organizations. Various 1994 estimates place the number of guerrillas around 6,000 after the demobilization of various organizations.

[35]See Brian M. Jenkins, "Colombia's Bold Gamble for Peace," RAND Paper Series (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, February 1985); and Colombian Joint Staff of the Armed Forces (Bogotá: 25 June 1982), cited in Olga Behar, Guerras de la Paz (Bogotá: Planeta Colombiana Editorial, 1985), pp. 309-310, for initial civilian and military reactions to the National Peace Process.

[36]See statements by an undisclosed multi-star, Colombian Army general, in Behar, pp. 309-310.

publicly adhering to its tradition of consent and obedience to civilian authority, the military accepted the administration's policies. The military "eventually backed the amnesty" but also "insisted on their own interpretation of the amnesty legislation."[37] This led to confrontations between army and guerrilla forces which threatened the cease-fire agreements.

In 1983, the apparent agreement between the government and the armed forces began to unravel. In February, the Colombian Attorney General declared that several military members were involved with the *Muerte a los Secuestradores* (MAS) paramilitary group.[38] The armed forces responded with an uproar, donated a day's salary from all military members to fund the defense of the accused, and high-ranking military generals and admirals assumed responsibility for such

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[37]Marc W. Chernick, "Negotiated Settlement to Armed Conflict: Lessons from the Colombian Peace Process," Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 30 (Winter 1988-1989): 61.

[38]MAS (Death to Kidnappers) is an illegal paramilitary group created in 1981 in response to the kidnapping of Martha Nieves, sister of an influential Medellín drug lord, Jorge Luis Ochoa Vázquez, by the M-19. Subsequently, the MAS "became a death squad, targeting left-wing politicians, students, and [Communist] party members," Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, Colombia: A Country Study, ed. Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1990), p. 53, hereafter cited as Country Study. It is believed that the creation of MAS led to the consolidation of prominent drug leaders for security purposes and the subsequent formation of the Medellín Cartel.

defense.[39] Although the conflict between the military and the government did not lead into a coup, this conflict created a political polarization concerning the direction of the government's policies and the degree of autonomy of the armed forces. The military became, by necessity, involved in civilian politics and maintained a hardline concerning national security and the National Peace Process in order to maintain the degree of autonomy achieved during the Turbay Ayala administration.

After the cease-fire agreement of 1984, there were even more altercations between guerrillas and armed forces, increased counterinsurgency military operations in the countryside, especially in the Cauca Department (most of them without presidential approval), and increased paramilitary activity against guerrilla organizations. The M-19 declared that the government had broken the cease-fire agreements and in return conducted the seizure of the Justice Palace in November, 1985. The M-19 accused the Betancur government of violating the agreements and the "trust of the Colombian people" and attempted to use the Supreme Court, Colombia's most esteemed institution, as mediator between them and the

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[39]See Francisco Leal Buitrago, Estado y Política en Colombia, 2 ed. (Bogotá: Editorial Presencia, 1989), pp. 296-298, for an analysis of the conflict between the military and the Betancur administration concerning the amnesty, economic reform, and MAS involvement.

government.

The armed forces quickly responded to the takeover without awaiting for civilian orders, and as former president Turbay Ayala stated, "once a military operation starts, it is difficult to stop it."[40] President Betancur was unable to stop the operation once in progress and had to give in to military pressure. Furthermore, he refused to negotiate with the M-19 or to listen to their demands. In the ensuing battle, 95 people were killed, including all the M-19 members, the majority of magistrates, the president of the Supreme Court, and several people "disappeared."[41]

Although the M-19 received a major tactical defeat in this operation, the events also damaged the image of the government and of the armed forces. Two main issues concerning the government's reaction towards the seizure of the Justice Palace were raised: (1) Betancur's unwillingness to negotiate with the M-19 after advocating a national dialogue between the government and all armed groups earlier during his administration; and (2) "the lack of political

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[40]Germán Hernández C., La Justicia en Llamas (Bogotá: Carlos Valencia Editores, 1986), p. 110.

[41]See Carmen Cecilia Pinzón Rueda, El Comportamiento de los Medios de Comunicación Frente a la Toma del Palacio de Justicia (Bogotá: Editorial Presencia, 1988); Ramón Jimeno, Noche de Lobos (Bogotá: Editorial Presencia, 1989); and Hernández C. for details concerning the role of the media, seizure of the Justice Palace, and the historic setting.

control over the [armed forces] institution was decisive in the alienation of the M-19" and by "protecting their institution... the military consolidated their independent stance from Betancur's policies."[42] These issues became critical arguments against the results of long years of state militarization.

A series of factors were extremely influential in the apparent decay of military professionalism and the outcome of such tragic events as the seizure of the Justice Palace. First, the inability of President Betancur to effectively create a civil-military coalition which could eventually lead to effective civilian control of the armed forces. After years of great autonomy and almost complete control of national security and defense issues, the military was unwilling to delegate some of that responsibility back to civilian authorities. Since the National Front, the military was given almost complete control over national security and defense. Although the Superior Council of National Defense was composed by civilian and military ministers, the council became increasingly inactive, demonstrating the lack of

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[42]Jimeno, pp. 201-202. Even government studies and reports corroborate the lack of civilian control of the operation: Colombia, Tribunal Especial de Investigación, Informe Sobre el Holocausto del Palacio de Justicia (Noviembre 6 y 7 de 1985) (Bogotá: Derecho Colombiano, 1986); and the official report of Carlos Jiménez Gómez, Colombian Attorney General, cited in Rafael Cribari, Colombia: Operación Exterminio (Montevideo, Uruguay: Editorial Monte Sexto, 1988), p. 19.

interest by civilian elites on national security matters, thus causing a shift of influence and power towards the military leadership. After the seizure of the Justice Palace and the disintegration of the truce between the military and armed groups, President Betancur was unable to alter this trend and was forced to give in to military pressure and to abandon the peace initiative.

Internal factors within the Colombian military, such as military thought and doctrine, also shed light upon the civil-military conflict during the Betancur administration and provide valuable insight of military actions, operations, and long-term goals. The armed forces, as defenders of the nation and the Constitution, believed that it was in the hands of competent and lawful civilian authorities to control the destiny of the nation. General Fernando Landazábal Reyes, Minister of Defense during the initial stages of the Betancur administration, warned that "trying to place our army or our natural bosses as a power alternative is just a clear demonstration of a complete ignorance about our institution and our men" when referring to attempts of merging countersubversive and political ambitions.[43] Although military members and leaders may have conflicts or disagreements with the central government, the military, as an institution, has

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[43]Fernando Landazábal Reyes, Páginas de Controversia (Medellín: Editorial Bedout, 1983), p. 9.

repeatedly adhered to the principle of civilian authority and has not attempted to take control of the government.

A closer look at the military's subordination to civilian authority uncovers contradictions which are perceived as natural in Colombian society. Since the establishment of the National Front, several high-ranking generals have been forced to retire because of conflicts between them and the executive.[44] According to the principle of "no deliberation," as stated in the Constitution, military members are banned from politics, including the right to vote. Actions such as derogatory public statements against standing government policies could lead military members to forced retirement or to dismissal by the commander-in-chief. The dismissals of high ranking officers, including several Ministers of Defense, have not resulted in any perceivable turmoil within the armed forces. The dismissed officers just stepped down and were swiftly replaced by the president. Speculation of inevitable coups always followed, but these coups never materialized. These dismissals reflect political ambitions and serious

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[44]High-ranking military officers such as Generals Alberto Ruiz Novoa, Guillermo Pinzón Caicedo, Alvaro Valencia Tovar, Gabriel Puyana, Samudio Molina, Fernando Landazábal Reyes, and Colonel Valentín Jiménez have been "dismissed," or resigned, under various presidents. These dismissals followed two distinct lines: (1) conflict between the executive and military dealing with reformist views (ie., Ruiz Novoa and Pinzón Caicedo), and (2) conflict of opinions on public order (ie., Valencia Tovar and Landazábal Reyes). See Caicedo, p. 274.

differences within the ranks, but the armed forces, as an institution, have been able to firmly adhere to the constitutional principles they have sworn to defend.

The military perception of national threat also contributed to the degree of conflict between the armed forces and civilian authority. The military continued to perceive international communism as the primary threat to the Colombian state, greatly influenced by the Cold War and U.S. training and foreign policy dealing with Central America. The military even accused the Colombian Communist Party, a legal political body, of being Soviet agents and providing the leadership for all guerrilla movements, disregarding ideological and strategic differences between the movements.[45] But, unlike the 1960s and 1970s, where there was only one perceived threat, the communist and foreign supported guerrilla groups, the military and civilian leaders started to define organized crime and narcotrafficking as increasingly threatening the established system.[46] After the murder of

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[45]Fernando Landazábal Reyes, El Precio de la Paz (Bogotá: Editorial Presencia, 1985), pp. 40, 193, 200-201. Although General Landazábal Reyes and General Alvaro Valencia Tovar retired because of conflicts with the executive, both are widely regarded as current intellectual leaders of the armed forces.

[46]Augusto Moreno Guerrero, "Balance y Proyección," Revista de las Fuerzas Armadas (hereafter cited as RFA) no. 118 (January-March 1986): 259. But military articles such as Alfonso Plazas Vega, "La Guerra que el Mundo Libre Está Perdiendo," RFA no. 112 (July-September 1984): 357-378, continued to illustrate foreign communist influence, led by the Soviet Bloc, as the most serious

Justice Minister Rodrigo Lara Bonilla in April, 1984, narcoterrorism became an ill-defined but serious threat to domestic peace.[47] Nevertheless, narcotrafficking did not achieve major proportions and organization until the late 1980s, and therefore, was not considered a major threat during the Betancur administration.

The military continued to believe that guerrilla groups presented the largest threat to the Colombian state. The military recognized that subversion had social origins and there could be no total victory if the causes for that social unrest were not addressed. As long as they would go unchecked, deplorable social, political, and economic conditions would continue to be the foundation for subversion. Even critiques on the national education system arose as it was considered fertile ground for the dissemination of Marxist concepts and dogma in schools and universities.[48] Therefore, a greater and improved relationship and understanding between the military and the Colombian people were required. Civic-

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threat to the Free World and to developing nations.

[47]Lewis Tambs, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, utilized the term "narcoguerrilla" in 1984 to denote ties between narcotraffickers and guerrilla organizations. The term became popular and widely accepted by military analysts as evidence began to emerge supporting the allegation. In turn, the term "narcoterrorism" evolved as a natural response to large-scale, drug-related violence.

[48]Landazábal Reyes, Páginas, pp. 4-15.

action programs reappeared during the Betancur administration, partly in order to deal with the spreading communist "disease," but also to keep the military away from the peace initiative.[49] Emphasis was placed during the 1980s on the "common responsibility" of the armed forces and the Colombian people to guard and be concerned about national defense, while at the same time, tacitly reserving defense decision-making for the military.[50]

Another contradiction began to emerge in the dominating military thought. The military believed that subversion had social, political, military, and economic origins, yet its leadership believed that the imposition of the state of siege was one of the most useful tools to deal with the communist threat. Before the ratification of the 1993 Constitution, a Colombian president could call a state of siege without congressional approval any time he deemed it necessary in order to deal with matters of public safety. Since 1948, the state of siege has rarely been lifted. The state of siege prohibited the rights to assemble, to demonstrate, to transit, and to strike (strikes could only last up to 43 days). It

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[49]Blair Trujillo, p. 143.

[50]See Gustavo Ramírez García, "Imagen de la Defensa Nacional en la Opinión Pública," RFA no. 116 (July-September 1985): 15-25. He stresses civilian, human, economic, financial, industrial, agricultural, transportation, and mass communication mobilization to deal to support national defense.

could also establish censorship, curfews, and promote the retention of suspects without probable cause.[51] Lifting of the state of siege by the president as part of the Peace Initiative was perceived by the military as just a political tactic by the executive and as an impediment for total victory, as it was lifted on the verge of winning the war against subversion and automatically cancelled the National Security Statute.[52]

In reality, the state of siege only addressed the military aspect of the problem, downplaying and downright offsetting other initiatives such as civic-action programs while basic freedoms were infringed. Furthermore, a permanent state of siege, as sponsored by the military, was not characteristic of a competitive, representative democracy--the foundation of the republican Colombian state.

Finally, disagreements over the National Peace Commission's decisions and the accusations of the Attorney General concerning association with MAS brought additional friction between the government and the armed forces. As stated previously, the military did not take part in the negotiations. This brought resentment as the military thought that it was the only institution which continuously dealt and

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[51]Caicedo, pp. 213-215.

[52]Landazábal Reyes, Páginas, pp. 48-49; and Precio, p. 51.

fought against the subversive movements. An additional conflict arose from the nature of the amnesty. The amnesty did not require a mandatory disarming by the armed groups. Thus, it legitimized the existence of "paramilitary" leftist groups within the national boundary, which was contrary to the Constitution,[53] and placed the guerrillas at the same level as the military.

The military continued to reject any accusations implicating military involvement with right-wing paramilitary groups. Although there was mounting evidence of this involvement by individual members, the military hierarchy consistently rejected these accusations and did not admit any involvement whatsoever by military members during the Betancur's administration. Military involvement in paramilitary groups will be addressed in Chapter 3 below.

In summary, the combination of four decades of violence, guerrilla warfare, terrorism, foreign campaigns[54], and foreign training in national security matters and counterinsurgency operations influenced civil-military relations and established a legacy of limited military involvement in Colombian

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[53]Idem, Precio, p. 206.

[54]Colombia participated in the UN-sponsored Korean Conflict (1950-1953); in the Suez Canal (1956-1958) as part of the UN Emergency Force after the War of a Hundred Hours between Israel and Egypt; and in the Sinai as part of the UN Multinational Force and Observer Group (1982-1991). See Valencia Tovar, vol. 3, Chapter XII.

politics. The increased autonomy of the armed forces during the National Front and the following presidencies clashed with Betancur's efforts to control the violence and guerrilla crisis. As Elsa Blair insists, the armed forces were influential actors in the failure of Betancur's peace policy because of the lack of clarity by the administration about the role of the military in the initiative, the incapacity to incorporate them into the dialogue with the guerrilla groups, the immense power of local private sectors using public force for their own benefit, the military mentality formed by 30 years of counterinsurgency, and interior differences within the military itself.[55]

Although filled with civil-military conflicts, the Betancur administration was extremely important for the definition of the future role and limitations of the armed forces, the modification of the existing threat perception, and the future demobilization of several armed groups. This period also led to the establishment of basic military doctrine reform which would later be refined at the end of the decade. The formation of a new Special Operations Center in 1985 revealed efforts to upgrade the tactical and operational capabilities of the Colombian Army, while at the same time, refining priorities and accepting new and unconventional uses

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[55]Blair Trujillo, pp. 142, 152.

of the military against unconventional adversaries such as narcotraffickers and criminal elements, as well as guerrilla groups.[56]

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[56]Víctor Hugo Ferreira Abella, "Nuevo Centro de Operaciones Especiales," RFA no. 115 (April-June 1985): 393-399.

CHAPTER 3

1986-1990: BARCO AND INCREASED EXPENDITURES, DRUGS, AND CHANGING ROLE OF THE ARMED FORCES

When conservative President Virgilio Barco Vargas assumed power in 1986, civil-military relations were at an all-time low since the formulation of the National Front. During his term in office, President Barco and the military hierarchy implemented fundamental changes to the organization, structure, and orientation of the military which reversed the trend of military contempt towards civilian oversight and improved the public image and the operational readiness of the armed forces. This initiative was implemented in part as a reaction to the events during the seizure of the Justice Palace, but more importantly, as a response to the multiplying perceived threats to the Colombian state and to the military institution.

The new Barco administration followed an "integral policy" for the conservation of public order. This integral policy combined efforts to strengthen the armed forces; modernize the administration of justice; establish social programs and political reform; and commitment to the

protection of human rights.[57] Barco also continued the economic National Rehabilitation Plan, initially formulated by President Betancur. Barco utilized this plan as "the engine for his peace strategy," and its purpose was "to take away the social base from the guerrilla by [promoting] state presence in the conflict zones and in traditionally marginalized or state forgotten zones."[58]

Initially, direct negotiations with guerrilla groups took a distant second in the priorities of the new administration. But political and public pressure forced Barco to change strategy and pursue a new dialogue with the guerrilla groups by launching his "Initiative for Peace."[59] Although the initiative was heavily criticized by the guerrilla groups because it initially removed political reform from the agenda, the initiative had the support of the military because it was directly involved in the negotiations. The Initiative for Peace led to the demobilization of the M-19, the Popular Liberation Army (EPL), the Quintin Lame Movement, and the Workers' Revolutionary Party (PRT) during the initial stages of President Gaviria's term in 1990. After that point, only

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[57]Virgilio Barco Vargas, "Tierra Arrasada o Rendición: Una Falsa Dicotomía," speech to the Colombian Army, Bogotá, 6 August 1988, quoted in RFA, no. 128 (July-September 1988): 271.

[58]Blair Trujillo, pp. 153-154.

[59]Ibid., p. 155.

the FARC and the National Liberation Army (ELN) remained as active revolutionary movements in Colombia.

As opposed to the previous decades, Colombia had serious geopolitical concerns during the mid and late 1980s. These concerns involved the San Andrés and Providencia Archipelagos, contested by Nicaragua (which was controlled by the Sandinista government), and waters off the Guajira Peninsula, Islas Los Monjes, and the Gulf of Venezuela, contested by the Venezuelan government. During the Barco administration, relations with the Sandinista government improved, but the Gulf of Venezuela presented a greater source of conflict because of oil deposits in the area. The territorial dispute with Venezuela was compounded by the flow of illegal immigration into Venezuela by undocumented, poor Colombians in search of employment; by drug traffickers' activity in the border zone; and by rival notions of national prestige between the two countries.

In August, 1987, spearheaded by the frigate Caldas and with reported air cover by Mirage fighters, Colombian warships entered the disputed waters in the Gulf of Venezuela.[60] The Venezuelan Navy and Air Force immediately responded by placing several units along the border on alert. This incident placed

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[60]The real political or strategic purpose of this deployment has not been disclosed by the Colombian government, yet possible reasons may include efforts to increase public support towards the armed forces, consolidation of public support of the territorial dispute, or a show of force to the Venezuelan government demonstrating Colombian national will.

both countries on the brink of war. After several days of tension, the Colombian ships withdrew, but forces of both countries remained on alert for several weeks. The crisis was ultimately solved through diplomatic means, improving bilateral relations and cooperation in border land patrolling against guerrillas and drug traffickers. Regardless of the intentions of the Colombian incursion, the incident demonstrated that the Colombian armed forces were not prepared for a full-scale confrontation with the well-trained and armed Venezuelan military. After the normalization of relations between the two countries, the Colombian armed forces began to assess their operational effectiveness and readiness for an external conflict.

The armed forces and the Colombian government perceived the geopolitical ramifications of the territorial dispute with Venezuela as a threat to national integrity, although a direct confrontation was regarded as unlikely once relations normalized. Several initiatives were taken by the military to modernize and professionalize the institution in order to deal with any future external conflicts. The military began these initiatives with changes in its recruiting program. In 1985, Law 31 approved <u>paid</u> voluntary service. This resulted in a dramatic increase of volunteers into the armed forces. In 1987, Executive Decree 72 increased to two years the obligatory active duty service commitment, emphasizing that

"every able citizen [was] required to serve in the military service, but there [were] many who avoid[ed] this commitment by interposing money."[61] Disregarding efforts to avoid military service by the upper echelons of society, the armed forces attempted to improve recruiting techniques and increase the technical expertise of its personnel.

Under the auspices of General Samudio Molina, Minister of Defense, the military also began to modernize its armaments and increase manning of all the services through increased military expenditures. Military expenditures throughout the 1970s and 1980s were relatively stable and stayed at less than 2 percent of the GDP. As part of the total central government budget, military expenditures grew considerably during the Barco administration. During the early 1980s, military expenditures fluctuated between 7 and 10 percent of the total government budget. In contrast, this figure grew steadily to almost 15 percent of total public expenditures in 1988, second highest after education.[62] In addition to increased military expenditures, Colombia also relied on U.S. military assistance in the form of Foreign Military Sales credits and

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[61]Caicedo, p. 224.

[62]See Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers, 1989 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1990), p.43; and Country Study, p. 287.

International Military Education and Training.[63]

Increased expenditures allowed the armed forces to increase manning and modernize an aging arsenal of arms and equipment. Manning increased by 20 percent between 1986 and 1988 as a result of improved recruiting techniques as well as increased funding.[64] The Army, the largest branch of the Colombian armed forces, was in need of newer materiel to update its World War II vintage equipment and armaments. It acquired armored cars, personnel carriers, and scout cars from Brazil, and optically tracked, wire-guided, antitank weapons (TOW) during this period. The Navy acquired vessels from West Germany and decided to upgrade the three attack submarines in its inventory. The Air Force purchased 13 C-7 Kfir's from Israel, in response to Venezuela's acquisition of two dozen F-16s in the mid-1980s, and acquired five Blackhawk helicopters from the U.S. intended for counternarcotics operations.[65] Finally, the modernization efforts also improved such areas as logistics, communications, lodging, and

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[63]Country Study, p. 288.

[64]According to Caicedo, p. 225., between 1985 and 1988, the members in the armed forces (including the National Police and other support agencies) increased from 130,000 to 207,000.

[65]Country Study, pp. 282-286. Also see Virgilio Barco Vargas, "La Doctrina Colombiana de la Fuerzas Armadas," speech at the Escuela Superior de Guerra, Bogotá, 4 May 1989, quoted in RFA, no. 131 (April-June 1989), for a more detailed account of the modernization process.

transportation, which affected operational readiness for both internal and external conflicts.

The purchases of high-tech equipment resulted in heavy criticism from the media and various sectors of Colombian society because they were seen as unnecessary and in complete contradiction to existing military doctrine. The military still viewed the guerrilla movements as the principal threat to the Colombian state, yet these purchases were done in response to an increasingly unlikely external threat. Even U.S. and Colombian military personnel working jointly recognized the liability of rerouting limited resources, as "too large a portion of those resources [was] directed toward the external threat," while "soldiers, sailors, marines and airmen lack[ed] the basic and essential support to conduct successful counterinsurgency operations and to cooperate meaningfully with the National Police in confronting the narcotics problem."[66]

While a perceived external threat influenced the modernization efforts of military materiel and structure, more serious internal threats influenced changes in the operational and doctrinal spheres. In turn, this led to a more consolidated "military focus" within the Colombian armed

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[66]Department of Defense, Combined Committee of Colombia and the United States with Respect to Logistics and Maintenance, "Preliminary Report of the Combined Internal Defense Requirements Survey-Colombia" (Bogotá: n.p., 18 February 1988), p. 4.

forces. Narcotrafficking became increasingly rampant in Colombia during the late 1980s, and it was viewed by the Barco administration as a threat to national integrity because of its corrupting and violent effects on society. But historically, the military "[was] far more concerned with fighting guerrillas than with fighting drugs."[67] The guerrilla organizations presented a higher corporate threat to the military and to the dominant ideology they were sworn to defend. Although the Colombian military recognized that narcotrafficking jeopardized the traditional democratic values of the nation, military leaders increasingly believed that dealing with the drug problem was a legal affair which needed to be handled by the National Police, not by the armed forces, because of its possible corrupting influence within its ranks.

It was not until after the assassination of Colombian Attorney General Carlos Mauro Hoyos in January, 1988, that the military was willing to become more involved in the fight against drugs. This assassination demonstrated that the drug cartels constituted a threat to Colombian society, to the constitutional authorities, and to the stability of the established system. After a wave of narcotics-related violence and U.S. pressure, President Barco was "compelled to order the military into [counternarcotics] action because of

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[67]"Colombia Cracks Up," Report on the Americas 23 (April 1990): 12.

widespread public concerns over police effectiveness."[68]

Classic definitions of perceived threats were affected by narcotrafficking. In 1989, Barco's Minister of Defense, General Manuel Guerrero Paz, stated that

> The most important issue facing the forces of public order is the confrontation with the cartels of Cali and Medellín. But there exists a third cartel which is politically and socially more pernicious, harmful and dangerous for the institutional stability of the country. That cartel is the FARC.[69]

Although the term "narcoguerrilla" had especially dangerous connotations for foreign policy, the Barco government uncovered an increasingly harsh reality which was clouding classic threat perception definitions: the direct involvement of FARC guerrillas in the drug business.

Barco's war against drugs forced the armed forces into making drastic changes in the operational field, while it also complicated the threat assessment efforts of the security forces. In the confusing Colombian battlefield, threats often became blurred, as many of the paramilitary, guerrilla, and narcotrafficking organizations temporarily sought each other's

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[68]Country Study, p. 309; also see Louis W. Goodman and Johanna S.R. Mendelson, "The Threat of New Missions: Latin American Militaries and the Drug War," in The Military and Democracy: The Future of Civil-military Relations in Latin America, ed. Louis W. Goodman, Johanna S.R. Mendelson, and Juan Rial (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1990), p. 192.

[69]Marc W. Chernick, "The Drug War," Report on the Americas 23 (April 1990): 37-38.

cooperation, while disregarding ideological preferences.[70] This complicated the military's task of providing security within the national boundaries.

The U.S. government, in response to the increase drug inflow from Latin American countries, declared during the Reagan administration in the mid-1980s that drugs and drug trafficking constituted a threat to the U.S. national security. The Bush administration provided Colombia a $65 million emergency U.S. aid package in September 1989 as part of the first phase of President Bush's Andean Strategy. This package consisted mostly of conventional arms, not police equipment or intelligence-gathering devices.[71] This is illustrative of U.S. influence in counternarcotics efforts in the Andean region, and its emphasis on the use of military forces for such efforts. Military aid and training by the U.S. government provided the grounds for excellent bilateral relations in the late 1980s. But while this assistance began "to improve the Colombian armed forces' capabilities in the

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[70]In addition to FARC involvement in the production and distribution of drugs, narcotraffickers sought guerrilla protection for their jungle cocaine laboratories in exchange of a production "tax," and paramilitary and drug organizations joined against leftist leaders and sympathizers.

[71]Bruce M. Bagley, "Myths of Militarization: Enlisting Armed Forces in the War on Drugs," in Drug Policy in the Americas, ed. Peter H. Smith (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1992), p. 138.

area of narcotics control and interdiction,"[72] it neglected the modernization efforts of the National Police.

Although the armed forces were heavily involved in counternarcotics efforts, the National Police was, and still is, primarily responsible for the national counternarcotics program. But as part of the Ministry of Defense, the National Police constitutes primarily an official paramilitary organization, or fourth branch of service. As such, it has to compete for budgetary quotas against the other branches of the military. Officers in the National Police have military ranks, although they are solely trained within the police training programs and do not alternate between police and military service.[73]

In the 1980s, the National Police assumed control of the Directorate of the Judicial Police and Investigation (*Dirección de la Policía Judicial e Investigación*-DIJIN), which was formerly under the Ministry of Justice, and was responsible for criminal investigations. This consolidation of functions in the National Police was representative of a greater consolidation of power devised to enhance the operational capabilities of the police force in respect to investigations, enforcement, and prosecution of criminal and

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[72]Country Study, p. 270.

[73]Ibid., p. 293.

drug cases, in addition to enhancing its position viz-a-viz the armed forces. Through the creation of special units such as the Special Operations Group (GOES) and the Antinarcotics Police, the National Police anticipated increased effectiveness dealing with narcotrafficking and the rising wave of political violence and crime.[74]

One important factor affecting the effectiveness of both the armed forces and the National Police is the distribution of responsibilities. In Colombia, this distribution follows geographical criteria. The Army, Air Force, Navy, and the National Police have specific geographic areas of responsibility. In many cases, such distribution has resulted in a particular service having insufficient resources and expertise in that geographic region.[75] Overlaps are frequent, and even distribution of responsibility within a single service or particular area could create additional problems.

Just as a perceived external threat and a surging and extremely violent narcotraffic redefined priorities within the

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[74]The National Police was, and still is, responsible for law enforcement and counternarcotics, and is also involved in counterinsurgency, civic action in rural areas, riot control in urban centers, administration of the prison system, and administration of security guards. Many of these functions are directly shared with the armed forces. Ibid., p. 296.

[75]For example, the Navy is responsible for the Atlantic plains, but the Marines in that area lack the expertise, equipment, and training to deal with the guerrilla and paramilitary growth in that area. See "Porqué No Cogen a Escobar," Semana, 15 May 1990, pp. 22-25, for details.

military structure, the acceptance of the existence of ties between the military and paramilitary organizations in Colombia led to changes in the armed forces self-conceptualization and a reformulation of the concept of security during the Barco administration. Although paramilitary groups were mostly "private armies," there were definite connections between them and army personnel. During the 1980s, there was a sharp increase in the number of paramilitary organizations. The Colombian Attorney General, César Gaviria, disclosed in 1987 a list of 140 paramilitary groups operating in the country, and many of them had retired or active duty personnel within their ranks.[76] Additionally, there had been cases of army officers who allowed paramilitary groups to use military facilities as communication and training centers.[77]

The announcement by the Colombian Attorney General denoted a basic change in the government perception of paramilitarism. President Barco manifested that "narcotrafficking, private justice [paramilitary activity], subversion, and common crime [were] the principal enemies of

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[76]Cribari, pp. 24-29. Also see Blair Trujillo, p. 160.

[77]Jenny Pearce, "The Dirty War," Report on the Americas 23 (April 1990): 28. This article provides documented cases of individual involvement by military members in right-wing, paramilitary activity.

human rights,"[78] thus providing for the first time a recognition of the paramilitary problem by the executive. In addition, Barco modified the definition of perceived threats to the Colombian state by admitting that paramilitary "groups are not simply criminals, but constitute real terrorist organizations. Criminal actions are shielded in vain behind anti-communism and the struggle against the guerrillas."[79]

The development and activity of parallel armies, as they were commonly known, denoted increased unofficial militarization of the public order. Although these groups mainly targeted leftist civilians, guerrilla leaders, and sympathizers, rather than government officials, traditional parties, or the military itself, the Colombian military finally recognized them as an institutional threat. As Janowitz stated, in Latin America, "the military emerged with an institutional perspective that was conservative and accepted the status quo."[80] Considering the historic conservative nature of the armed forces and their counterinsurgency commitment, individual military members, especially those in remote rural areas, were naturally drawn

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[78]Barco Vargas, "Tierra Arrasada o Rendición," in RFA, no. 128: 273.

[79]Idem., statement in El Tiempo (Bogotá), 20 April 1989, as quoted in Pearce, Labyrinth, p. 262.

[80]Janowitz, p. 14.

into right-wing, paramilitary activity. But the armed forces, as an institution and as defenders of the nation as a whole, considered that they were entitled to possess the "hegemony of the central military force" over paramilitary forces.[81] Furthermore, the military hierarchy realized that any involvement of individual members in paramilitary activity would detract from its public image and defeat efforts to gain public support in previously guerrilla-occupied areas.

As opposed to the early 1980s, the military initiated efforts to prosecute members allegedly involved in right-wing, paramilitary activity and death squads. Although several accused military members were later released or received mild sentences in military courts, the military reacted to this new institutional threat by forcefully campaigning to dismantle these organizations. These operations were extremely effective as most of the paramilitary organizations were disbanded by the end of Barco's term. Perhaps the most important efforts of the Barco administration were "suspending a 1968 law which allowed the Ministry of Defense to distribute army-issue weapons to private citizens;"[82] and Executive Decree 814 of 1989, which "created the Special Armed Corps of the Police, known as

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[81]Ibid., pp. 30-31.

[82]Gregory R. Copley, ed., Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook (London: International Media Corporation Limited, 1994), p. 256.

'Elite Corps,' assigned to combat death squads, paramilitary groups, and narcotrafficking organizations.[83]

Although the success of the Initiative for Peace, the redefinition of perceived threats, the subsequent increase in military expenditures and reorganization programs, and the changes in self-conceptualization caused by the recognition of paramilitary groups alleviated conflicts in civil-military relations, some tension persisted resulting from military privileges inherent in the military legal penal system (*fuero militar*). As discussed previously, during the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, civilians could be tried in military courts as a result of the almost continuous state of siege. This procedure was enforced primarily on "confirmed" guerrilla members and sympathizers. Furthermore, the Constitution provided that military personnel could only be tried in military court martials, not civil courts, for crimes committed while on active duty, thus constituting the legal foundation of the military legal penal code. This presented a problem for civilian prosecutors because it shielded violators of human rights from civilian justice.[84] Essentially, the executive could not carry out his duties to

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[83]Francisco Leal Buitrago, "Defensa y Seguridad Nacional en Colombia, 1958-1990," discussion draft [ca. 1992], p. 51.

[84]See Caicedo, pp. 230-233. Also see "El Fuero Militar," RFA, no. 130 (January-March 1989): 3-6, for military opinion of the *fuero militar* and the military penal system.

enforce the laws within the national boundaries and within certain segments of the state. This constituted one more factor in the militarization of fundamental aspects of society.

A final change during the Barco administration affecting the professionalization process of the Colombian military dealt with the operational and doctrinal orientation of the armed forces. Barco's defense policy followed the concept of "firm pulse and open hand," recognizing that the solution to the internal problems of the country could not reside solely on military victory. However, a highly-trained, well-equipped military force was essential for achieving and maintaining internal peace.

The Colombian armed forces continued their efforts to emphasize unconventional warfare when confronted with guerrilla, paramilitary, and narcotraffic activity. Although the military had been involved in counterinsurgency operations since the 1960s, there was no institutional interest in understanding or applying the existing theoretical principles as well as no cohesive effort to join strategic and tactical goals. According to Pearce,

> Strategic thinking in the armed forces had shifted in favour of low-intensity conflict (LIC). This attempted to adapt traditional counterinsurgency thinking to the 1970s and 1980s-when revolutionary movements were no longer the isolated bands of guerrillas they were in the 1960s, but influenced mass-based social and popular

movements.[85]

The military began to shift away from the National Security Doctrine concept of "total war" towards the more realistic "limited war." The military started to internalize the academic and theoretical counterinsurgency knowledge acquired through the years and applied them in the changing operational conditions of the 1980s. For the first time, the military explored ideas of low-intensity conflict and analyzed guerrilla ideology and strategy in order to understand and defeat subversion.[86] Furthermore, the internalization of these concepts enabled the military to understand the importance of a unified political, social, economic, and military front to defeat the wide spectrum of internal threats afflicting the country, to include narcotrafficking and paramilitarism. Although civic-action programs reemerged during the Betancur administration, it was not until this period that they were officially instituted as a legitimate function of the armed forces, unifying social, political, and military goals while extending the state's sphere of influence towards the rural

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[85]Pearce, Labyrinth, p. 205.

[86]There was a distinct departure in the writings of the Revista de las Fuerzas Armadas, the military's most prestigious publication, during the Barco administration. Topics such as LIC and revolutionary ideology where discussed and analyzed publicly for the first time in the decade. See Manuel J. Guerrero Paz, "Colombia: Objetivo Estratégico y los Conflictos de Baja Intensidad," speech in Medellín, quoted in RFA, no. 128 (July-September 1987): 275-282.

areas.[87]

As demonstrated in this discussion, civil-military relations during the Barco administration improved exponentially as the government traced a modernization strategy which was warmly welcomed by the military hierarchy. Barco's approach to the military in his policy for national rehabilitation and peace initiative promoted the formation of a civil-military coalition which was not able to develop during the Betancur administration. Again, the professionalization process of the military was greatly influenced by the redefinition of perceived threats. Contradictions emerged between the modernization program and perceived threats, yet this program increased military morale. In turn, this translated into better training and higher motivation to accomplish the goals prescribed by the executive.

The changes in military self-conceptualization resulted

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[87]Before the late 1980s, two opposing schools of thought in the armed forces concerning the nature of subversion prevented the institutionalization of civic-action programs in the military. One school promoted a solely military solution to the guerrilla threat (ie. General Camacho Leyva), while the other promoted reformist views addressing the social and economic origins of subversion, as well as maintaining military operations (ie. General Ruiz Novoa). See the discussion of conflicts between the military and the executive, Chapter 2 in this study. The institutionalization of civic-action is evident while examining references in the Revista de las Fuerzas Armadas and other military and popular publications throughout the period. Additionally, the Colombian military outlined its civic-action programs in Ministerio de Defensa, Memoria al Congreso Nacional, 20 July 1988.

from improved civil-military relations, a clearer perception of institutional threats, and the internalization and interpretation of assigned responsibilities. All these complementary factors were also influenced by changing world conditions such as the demise of international communism and of U.S. hegemony in the Western Hemisphere, and the replacement of traditional views of combat by unconventional interpretations of internal conflict.

While paramilitary activity was drastically curtailed, guerrilla activity continued as FARC and ELN forces regrouped and consolidated their command and control. Narcotrafficking, headed by the Medellín and Cali Cartels, was becoming a national tragedy as drug-related violence and corruption soared. Even though the Barco administration was not able to completely solve the problems of public order, it did manage to unify the government and its security forces under a common cause and to set the precedence for increased civilian control over national security.

CHAPTER 4

1990s: GAVIRIA AND THE INCREASE OF CIVILIAN CONTROL OF THE MILITARY

The August 1990 swearing-in ceremony of President César Gaviria Trujillo marked the beginning of a new era for the Colombian military professionalization process which was characterized by increased involvement of civilian authorities in national security matters. During his administration, President Gaviria strived to improve civil-military relations, to impose a concise policy dealing with subversion and narcotraffic, to improve bilateral relations with the U.S., and to continue Colombia's involvement in multinational peacekeeping efforts.

Gaviria announced the creation of the post of National Security Advisor, who became secretary of the National Defense Superior Council in order to guarantee civilian oversight in the handling of national security issues. Efforts to supervise and monitor military expending were initiated, after years of complete autonomy on such matters by the military hierarchy. Above all, it was the nomination of a civilian Defense Minister which demonstrated Gaviria's commitment to civilian control over the military and forces of public order.

A year after his inauguration, Gaviria appointed Rafael Pardo Rueda as "Colombia's first civilian Defense Minister [in

40 years]... who had announced his commitment to cleansing up security forces."[88] Two weeks later, he appointed another civilian, Fernando Bristo, as the head of the DAS. Although Pardo's appointment was opposed by many active duty and retired military officers, his reputation and personal expertise on military issues as a member of the National Rehabilitation Plan under Barco, Counselor during the Initiative for Peace, and National Security Advisor, quickly overcame the initial prejudices. Additionally, the military hierarchy recognized that the appointment of a civilian Defense Minister had various advantages. In their opinion, the military chain-of-command was strengthened by consolidating operational control at the General Command of the Armed Forces level, while removing the military from the political aspects of the Ministry.[89]

The appointment of two civilians to high posts in the security forces was just a logical step taken after years of speculation concerning the presence of a civilian Minister and the reorganization and modernization of the armed forces. According to Blair, it was, after years of neglect, a way for the civilian political elite to become involved with the responsibility of overseeing the military role in society.

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[88]"Violence Takes Over a Colombian City," New York Times, 1 March 1992, sec.1 , p. 12L.

[89]See "Regreso al Everfit," Semana, 27 August 1991, p. 23.

At the same time, it provided a more unified policy implementation, both internally and externally, especially when combating narcotrafficking.[90]

Delineating four distinct fronts, guerrilla, narcoterrorism, self-defense, and paramilitary groups, President Gaviria set the foundation for his "National Strategy Against Violence."[91] This strategy had the goals of "maintaining the arms monopoly by the state; regaining the effectiveness of the judiciary against crime and impunity; and extending constitutional control by the state of all national territories."[92] The government instituted five basic policies to accomplish these general goals:

> application of the strategy by region, strengthening and modernizing the judicial system, continuing a policy of peace with guerrilla groups, establishing concise [and forceful] policies dealing with the various agents of violence (guerrillas, narcotraffickers, organized crime, terrorists, kidnappers, and extortionists), and the protection and promotion of human rights.[93]

These policies implied a coordinated effort between the armed forces, National Police, judicial system, and other national security support organizations. Supporting the National

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[90]Blair Trujillo, p. 169.

[91]See Juan C. Palau, "Las Fuerzas Armadas y la Transición Constitucional en Colombia," Fuerzas Armadas y Sociedad 8 (October 1993): 12; and "Donde Manda Capitán," Semana, 14 August 1990, p. 39.

[92]"¿Misión Imposible?" Semana, 21 May 1991, p. 27.

[93]Ibid.

Strategy Against Violence, Minister Pardo immediately began to implement policies (formulated during his tenure as National Security Advisor) affecting military funding, managing apportioned military resources, the formulation of new anti-guerrilla tactics, the centralization of intelligence systems management, the disarming of civilians, and the strengthening of the justice system.[94]

In the guerrilla front, Gaviria followed the Initiative for Peace began by the Barco administration and within a year was able to demobilize various guerrilla groups which entered the national arena as legal political entities. In the narcoterrorist front, Gaviria contended that narcotrafficking had to be primarily treated by the National Police and the judicial system, not only by the military. Even during an unofficial visit to Washington D.C. before his inauguration, Gaviria rejected the U.S. emphasis "on a broader role for the Colombian military" in the counternarcotics campaign, and after assuming office he reaffirmed his commitment "to continue fighting drug trafficking but... [the] highest priority was to end domestic narcoterrorism rather than combat international drug smuggling",[95] thus emphasizing policing functions. Nevertheless, an executive directive in 1991

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[94]"Bastón de Mando a Un Civil," Semana, 24 December 1991, p. 42.

[95]Bagley, p. 139.

mandated that the armed forces and all its services would be directly involved in the campaign against drugs.[96]

During peacetime, according to Gaviria's initiative, the armed forces would be primarily responsible for external defense while the National Police would be responsible for internal order. During times of declared unrest by the president, the military would be first responsible for conducting military operations against subversive groups, and secondly, combating narcoterrorists.[97] This practice established a legal justification for the use of the military in the war against drugs from a national defense perspective. Finally, in the last two fronts, Gaviria continued the efforts he instituted as Attorney General to dismantle self-defense and paramilitary groups.

In 1991, a Constitutional Assembly was organized to ratify a new Constitution. The Constitutional Assembly was comprised of members of the traditional political parties and members of almost every single major interest group in Colombia, to include minor political parties and the newly formed *Alianza Democrática* M-19. The M-19 was able to gain the second largest delegation to the Assembly, larger than the

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[96]Ann M. Wells, Colombian Desk Officer, Department of State, interview by author, 17 May 1994, Washington D.C.

[97]Elisio Vergara, Fabio Garrido, and Jaime Plazas, Estudios de Países: Colombia (Washington D.C.: Inter-American Defense College, January 1994), p. 11.

Conservative Party's. Although most Assembly members agreed that changes were needed in the armed and police forces, Chapter 7, "Security Forces," remained essentially the same, and kept the National Police under the Ministry of Defense. The new Constitution stipulated that under no circumstances civilians could be investigated or tried under the Code of Military Penal Justice,[98] formally rejecting this heretofore standard practice by the military.

Political decisions reached by the central government resulted in changes in military organization and strategy. Following principles formulated during the Barco administration and incorporating them into the National Strategy Against Violence, the military sought to extend its influence in areas beyond its traditional control. In the words of President Gaviria, the security forces needed to extend their support to "those areas which have suffered violence... where police and military presence should be more extensive and permanent in order to recover full public confidence in state institutions."[99] Several efforts were initiated to pursue the new strategy.

First, the military established riverine bases throughout

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[98]Colombia, 1991 Constitution, Chapter 6, Article 213, cited in Alfredo Manrique Reyes, La Constitución de la Nueva Colombia (Bogotá: CEREC, 1991), p. 160.

[99]César Gaviria Trujillo, speech at Teatro Patria, Bogotá, 24 April 1993, quoted in RFA, no. 147 (April-June 1993): 13.

the complex fluvial network in order to expand the state presence in remote areas such as the Eastern Plains. Increased narcotraffic and guerrilla activity forced the government and the military to increase its presence in this region. With U.S. aid, the Colombian Navy established a riverine program to "develop within the Colombian Marine Corps a full-scale Mobile Riverine Task Force capable of conducting prolonged riverine operations in a hostile environment."[100] Currently, heavily armed, U.S.-supplied, "Piranha"-type boats constitute the bulk of the fleet, providing firepower, greater self-sufficiency, versatility, and speed in the jungle and river basins.[101]

Second, between 1990 and 1991, the creation of two mobile brigades and other elite units marked a clear departure from traditional military thought. These brigades were primarily directed to combat the *Coordinadora Guerrillera Simón Bolívar* (CGSM-composed FARC and ELN), and to target its leaders. Composed of 1,500 - 2,000 professional voluntary soldiers, the Mobile Brigades employ a wide variety of armaments, vehicles, artillery, and helicopters, in order to achieve the tactical elements of mobility and surprise essential for

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[100]Department of Defense, U.S. Marine Corps, "The USMC Counterdrug & Riverine Program in Colombia," [ca. December 1993], p. 5.

[101]"Seguridad y Vigilancia en los Ríos," Fuerzas Armadas, no. 405 (April 1993): 13.

counterguerrilla operations.[102] Moreover, to consolidate the command and control of their operations, a Counterguerrilla Special Operations Command was activated in early 1993, initially composed by the two Mobile Brigades and rural special operations battalions. These units have since been augmented by three new counterguerrilla battalions, and the command has been extremely effective against the CGSM combined guerrilla command.

Third, there was a coordinated effort to reinvigorate the intelligence services of the armed forces, National Police, and the DAS. In 1991, military intelligence was defined as a combat support arm, at the same level as infantry, artillery, cavalry, and engineering.[103] This redefinition was a clear indication of the impending major changes in the intelligence community and its priority in the Gaviria administration. Funding and manning for intelligence services and systems were increased, and a National Intelligence Board was created to coordinate intelligence efforts and implement policies formulated by the executive. These changes increased

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[102]Office of the Military Attaché, Embassy of Colombia, interview by author with Colombia military officers, 23 May 1994, Washington D.C. Air support includes 13 Blackhawks, 13 UH-1s, and one reconnaissance helicopter. Also see, Hernando Pérez Molina, "Soldados Voluntarios," RFA, no. 147 (April-June 1993): 22-23.

[103]See Alvaro Hernán Velandia Hurtado, "La Inteligencia Militar: El Arma de Apoyo de Combate," RFA, no. 145 (October-December 1992): 21-27.

the effectiveness of the intelligence system, but inherent problems of intelligence collection and analysis against unconventional threats limited the improvements.[104]

Finally, infrastructure protection units were created for the first time in response to increased ELN activity against economic targets such as oil pipelines, refineries, mines, electric power plants, and bridges, which were especially detrimental to foreign investment.

In July, 1992, the central civilian government and military authorities implemented the principles of the National Strategy Against Violence to deal with an alarming increase in narcoterrorism, fomented by the spectacular escape from jail by the Medellín Cartel chief, Pablo Escobar. His escape raised serious questions about Gaviria's intentions concerning narcotrafficking and the effectiveness of the prison system, managed by the National Police.

The government reacted by forming the *Bloque de Búsqueda* to track down Escobar. The *Bloque* was a joint organization composed of "highly specialized elements from the Army, Air Force, and the National Police, supported by regional prosecutors."[105] Subsequently, the fight against narcoterrorism

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[104]Intelligence against unconventional threats, such as guerrilla and narcotraffic organizations, rely primarily on human sources and sometimes cannot be confirmed by other sources.

[105]"Con Mística y Decisión," Fuerzas Armadas, no. 404 (February-March 1993): 12.

became a top priority of the government and the armed forces. The *Bloque* not only sought Escobar, but also dismantled the network of assets and support of the Medellín Cartel by carrying out "sweeping searches and arrests against the deteriorating remnants of [Escobar's] organization."[106]

On December 2, 1993, after 499 days of intense search for the drug lord, the *Bloque* was able to determine Escobar's location using communication interception devices obtained from the U.S. Escobar was surrounded and killed in the ensuing gunfight. His death was regarded as a triumph for the Colombian government and praised by the international community led by the U.S.[107] Although the Medellín Cartel subsequently disintegrated as many of its leaders were killed or jailed, narcotics dealing shifted towards the less violent but more refined and sophisticated Cali Cartel. Moreover, guerrilla involvement in the actual production and distribution of cocaine increased, complicating threat

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[106]John D. Martz, "Colombia: Democracy, Development, and Drugs," Current History (March 1994): 134.

[107]President Clinton immediately sent a cable to President Gaviria congratulating him and the Colombian forces involved in the search for their efforts. The Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics Matters, International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, (April 1993), acknowledge that "all Colombian security forces engage in narcotics control operations to some degree," p. 107. The document concedes that, although Escobar's escape became "a major embarrassment" to the Colombian government, President Gaviria was able to effectively crack down on the Medellín Cartel. The report became in Colombia solid evidence that the U.S. government recognized their counternarcotics efforts.

assessment efforts and further involving the armed forces in counternarcotics operations.

The Colombian military continued a self-imposed professionalization and modernization process apart from the structural changes fomented by perceived threats to the state and the political decisions of the Gaviria administration. During this period, greater emphasis was placed on education at all levels and services.[108] A higher education level was necessary for the increasingly technological and complex military battlefield. Not only was the military becoming more technological, but its enemies, narcotraffickers and guerrillas alike, were acquiring sophisticated equipment and techniques which were employed against the security forces.

As part of the officer professional development training, new emphasis was placed on the study of liberal arts and of guerrilla ideology and theory in order to understand the socio-economic roots of the subversive threat. This effort began during the Barco administration and has continued to the present. By studying the enemy's origins and strategy, Colombian military forces (especially the Mobile Brigades and counterguerrilla battalions) were able to effectively counteract guerrilla gains in rural areas. But currently,

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[108]See John Novoa Aguilar, "La Educación Superior y Fuerzas Armadas," RFA, no. 147 (April-June 1993): 79-83; and "Cambios Para Mejorar," Fuerzas Armadas, no. 406 (May-June 1993): 32.

these academic efforts are becoming more difficult as guerrillas increasingly operate for economic, as opposed to ideological, reasons.

In support of the National Strategy Against Violence goal of extending state control of all national territories, the military has continued stressing the importance of improved relations with the population through the expansion of civic-action programs. Although some U.S. government officials argue that the Colombian military is not well versed on the usefulness of civic-action, the Colombian military has instituted these programs in all areas of operations. The Army has even created a Civil-Military Relations School for the purpose of illustrating the importance of gaining the population's trust and support in order to reduce the social base of the guerrilla organizations.[109]

The military has also increased its efforts to improve its public image. Unconventional public relations campaigns such as the depicted "men of steel" have proven very successful in this respect. This campaign consists of introducing to the community a cadre of highly-trained, physically attractive, active duty soldiers, or "men of

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[109]Rafael Reyes Becerra, "Buen Trato a la Población Civil: Propósito del Comandante," RFA, no. 148 (July-September 1993): 10-13. Numerous articles in RFA, Fuerzas Armadas, and interviews at the Colombian Embassy confirm the importance placed on civic-action by the military hierarchy.

steel." These young soldiers, clad in military combat dress uniforms, are permanently assigned to community service, infrastructure building, civic-action projects, literacy campaigns, and military demonstrations. Started during the 1980s as a publicity campaign to improve the military's public image, the "men of steel" transformed from television commercials, to a music video, to its present form within the active duty ranks, taking advantage of popular ("pop") culture. Their popularity has indeed improved the image of the military among the public and has become a powerful recruiting tool.[110]

Improved operational effectiveness, civil-military relations, and public relations campaigns have resulted in an improved image of the Colombian military. Although the Colombian public regards corruption as the gravest problem in the public sector, the armed forces rank second behind the Catholic Church on public trust, according to annual polls conducted by a popular magazine.[111] On the other hand, the National Police ranks poorly in the same poll, indicative of a severe lack of trust from the population.

In March, 1993, the Gaviria government responded to increased reports of human rights abuses by the National

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[110]See "¡De Ataque!" Semana, 12 October 1993, p. 106-107.

[111]"Informe Especial," Semana, 11 January 1994, p. 55.

Police, DIJIN, and the Elite Corps, by announcing the formation of two special commissions to restructure and reform the National Police.[112] The commissions--one integrated by leaders of different segments of society, while the other by distinguished members of the National Police--considered the transfer of the police from the Ministry of Defense to the Ministry of Government, and the decentralization of the force to the departmental or local level as in other nations like the U.S. But it was more concrete and less controversial issues such as improvements in the selection of personnel, training, and internal control systems, which were essential for the reformation of the organization, that received the most attention.[113] An additional joint study was performed by the Attorney, Prosecutor, and Comptroller Generals, recommending civilian control over the police and instituting human rights training.

The final joint commission report stresses civilian control over the police force. This civilian control would be enhanced through three fronts: political, internal, and external citizen control. The Colombian Congress will

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[112]See Washington Office on Latin America, The Colombian National Police, Human Rights and U.S. Drug Policy (Washington D.C.: Washington Office on Latin America, 1993). The rape and murder of a ten year-old girl inside a Bogotá police station created a public outrage which resulted in the presidential announcement.

[113]"A Calificar Servicios," Semana, 30 March 1993, pp. 34-35.

legislate laws to increase the effectiveness of the police. Internal control will be exercised by a civilian Inspector General, appointed by the president, who will be at the same level as the Director of the National Police. External control will be accomplished through a representative citizen observer, selected by the president with House approval, to gather citizen anxieties and complaints and submit them to the Attorney General. To improve organizational aspects, the commissions recommended increased academic requirements for new recruits, improved psychological evaluations of all members, the establishment of specialized training, and improved lodging, subsidies, and salaries, in order to strengthen the integral professionalization of all agents.[114]

Modernization efforts were resumed in 1993. The post of Vice Minister was created to perform administrative tasks such as budgetary control and human and resource management. In October, the armed forces finalized their five-year plan. The overly optimistic goal of this plan is to double the operational capacity of the armed forces to stabilize internal

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[114]"Lista la Reforma," Semana, 25 May 1993, pp. 44-45. See Ministerio de Defensa, Reorganización, Modernización y Actualización de la Policía Nacional, insert to RFA, no. 406 (May-June 1993), for the final commissions' report on the National Police reorganization.

order within five years.[115] According to the plan, the government will invest $510 million "on projects that are already under way and scheduled to conclude within five years," but a large percentage of this amount "represent operational costs ranging from general services to the payment of pensions and salaries."[116] In other words, only 22 percent of the budget addresses operational modernization projects.

The five-year plan places priority on the upgrade of the armed forces' communications systems and the creation of an antiguerrilla battalion for each division in order to support the efforts of the two Mobile Brigades and the 25 antiguerrilla companies currently in existence. This initiative involves decentralization of the military efforts by providing the regional division commanders with trained and deployable combat forces, eliminating the need to pull forces from other zones to combat guerrillas.[117] The plan also envisions the doubling of Air Force assets over the next 10 years through the acquisition of various aircraft such as transport planes, eight Russian-made MI-8 helicopters and five

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[115]Clara Elvira Ospina, "Armed Forces Modernization Plan Outlined," El Tiempo (Bogotá-text in Spanish), 31 October 1993. Translated by Foreign Broadcast Information Service, FBIS Daily Report-Latin America, 9 November 1993 (PrEx 7.10: FBIS-LAT-93-214, p. 61); and Vergara, p. 10.

[116]Ospina, pp. 61-62.

[117]Ibid.

U.S. Blackhawk helicopters, which will be available to the brigades and will increase mobility and combat capability. Finally, the Navy plans to install new motors in all its gunships; strengthen its Coast Guard, which was created in 1992; continue its construction of riverine bases; and increase the number of river patrols to "control the flow of illegal dynamite, weapons, drugs, and chemical materials."[118]

Examining foreign relations, the Colombian government and military forces have demonstrated a continued support of treaties and international law, in addition to repeated participation in multinational peacekeeping and humanitarian operations. Colombia is a signatory member of the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance, or Rio Treaty, of 1947. Additionally, it is a founding member of the Organization of American States and an enthusiastic supporter of UN-sponsored military operations. According to a high-ranking, retired Colombian Army officer, Colombia has international legal obligations, firmly adhering to the concept of "Pacta Sum Servanda,"--pacts must be fulfilled.[119] In addition to its participation in Korea, the Suez Canal, and the Sinai, the military and National Police have recently

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[118]Ibid., p. 62.

[119]Farouk Yanine Díaz, General, Colombian Army (retired), interview by author, 18 May 1994, Washington D.C., tape recording, Inter-American Defense College, Washington D.C.

participated in multilateral peacekeeping efforts in Cambodia, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Yugoslavia. Though constrained by financial limitations, these efforts demonstrate Colombia's ambition to become a military leader in the region and to improve regional cooperation. Moreover, the Colombian military expects that international cooperation generated by these operations will translate into much needed international support for Colombia's counterguerrilla and counternarcotics efforts.

Bilateral military relations between Colombia and the U.S. remained excellent during most of Gaviria's administration. According to the Defense & Foreign Affairs Handbook, "Colombia receive[d] military assistance in many forms (MAP grants, IMET program, FMS financing) from the United States and its officers [had] been trained at the US-run School of the Americas."[120] Most of this assistance was tagged for the Colombian military's counternarcotics mission. This emphasis on counternarcotics operations for the military continued to create friction between the two governments. Although U.S. military assistance "strengthen[ed] bilateral

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[120]Copley, p. 260. According to Washington Office on Latin America, Clear and Present Dangers: The U.S. Military and the War on Drugs in the Andes (Washington D.C.: Washington Office on Latin America, October 1991), p. 154, Colombia has sent more officers to the School of the Americas than any other Latin American country. Between 1985-1990, Colombia sent 2882 officers to the School of the Americas, representing 36.7 percent of the total attendance for that period.

relations with the armed forces" by offering much-needed equipment, training, and financial resources, the U.S. antinarcotics policy "could weaken civilian leaders by increasing the resources and profile of the armed forces."[121] Most importantly, U.S. officials, influenced by past experiences in Vietnam and Central America during the 1980s, were not willing to provide aid for counterinsurgency purposes in Latin America.

In Colombia's case, counterinsurgency and counternarcotics efforts have been increasingly converging, as the ideological foundations of the guerrillas began to crumble with the demise of international communism and the Soviet Union, and the guerrilla organizations became increasingly involved in drug trafficking for economic gains. But the U.S. Congress has repeatedly assumed the stance of treating drug trafficking and guerrilla activity as completely separate threats to the Colombian and other states in the hemisphere. As stated by Colombian military officers, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to separate the two missions while in the field. In some instances, there is no way the military can operationally separate U.S.-provided, counternarcotics assets and equipment from counterinsurgency purposes, especially when the two threats are so intimately

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[121]Washington Office on Latin America, Clear and Present Dangers, pp. 2-4.

related.[122]

The U.S. government maintained a small presence of U.S. military personnel in Colombia during this period. In addition to military personnel assigned to the U.S. military group at the embassy, U.S. Special Forces personnel provided counternarcotics-related training; U.S. Army reserve forces conducted civic-action and nation-building missions for their annual training; naval and Marine Corps personnel assisted in the construction of Colombian riverine and coastal naval bases; and Air Force personnel manned radar sites used to track drug smuggling flights.

The presence of U.S. personnel was, and still is, a highly controversial topic in Colombia. Bilateral military and diplomatic relations remained favorable, but the presence of foreign troops in Colombian soil was perceived by large sectors of the population as a threat to national sovereignty. This perception promoted negative public reactions in February, 1994, when the presence of U.S. naval personnel in Juanchaco led to turmoil in the central government and the capital, and calls for the impeachment of President Gaviria began to rise.

President Clinton's administration has shifted the military emphasis in the U.S. antidrug policy to prevention

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[122]Previously quoted interview at the Office of the Military Attaché, Embassy of Colombia.

and providing training for internal security forces in the host nations to domestically deal with narcotrafficking. Furthermore, his administration regards the "promotion of democracy as a national security concern because democracies are the best guarantee of a stable world order."[123] According to Department of Defense sources, the use of the "military's organizational capacity and technical expertise in nation-building roles that will alleviate the burden on civilian governments while at the same time reducing the root causes of instability" should be a fundamental part in future U.S.-Latin American military relations.[124] For this reason, U.S. objectives in Colombia (1) support "efforts to strengthen and sustain democracy with emphasis on improving civil-military relations, professionalism of military, and respect for human rights;" and (2) "encourage joint police-military operations, intelligence cooperation, and airlift sharing."[125] The second objective illustrates the enduring importance of counternarcotics operations and operational concerns of the

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[123]Paul G. Buchanan and Mari Luci Jaramillo, "U.S. Defense Policy for the Western Hemisphere," North-South, the Magazine of the Americas 4 (July-August 1994): 4.

[124]Ibid., p. 9. Jaramillo is currently the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Inter American Region.

[125]Department of State, U.S. Agency for International Development, and Department of Defense, Defense Security Assistance Agency, Congressional Presentation for Building Democracy, FY 1995, p. 65.

U.S. government concerning the effectiveness of the Colombian National Police in such matters.

Bilateral relations quickly deteriorated during the final months of the Gaviria administration when the U.S. government abruptly cut intelligence sharing of drug smuggling flights with Peru and Colombia in May, 1994. An internal feud between the State and Defense Departments brought the interdiction efforts between the three countries to an end, and provoked the Colombian and Peruvian governments to retaliate by limiting U.S. intelligence collections in the region. The controversy began with the use of U.S. flight tracking data by the host nations to locate and force or shoot down suspected drug smuggling planes. State Department officials maintained that it is legal to share the intelligence provided by the U.S. radars in Colombia, while the Defense Department maintains that, according to a 1985 amendment to the 1948 Chicago Airline Convention, it is illegal to "share intelligence with a country that might use it to forcibly shoot down civil aircraft."[126] Influenced by the Navy's downing of an Iranian Airbus in 1988 and the Korean Airlines Flight 007 incident, Peruvian fighters shooting down suspected drug flights have alarmed officials in the Department of Defense. The end to intelligence sharing, in addition to U.S.

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[126]Lally Weymouth, "The Drug War: Another Retreat," Washington Post, 20 May 1994, p. 18A.

doubts about the new administration of Ernesto Samper (see Conclusions below, pp. 88-91), may be indicative of far-reaching obstacles that could jeopardize bilateral military relations between the U.S. and Colombia.

Despite the problems caused by U.S. government perceptions and lack of coordination concerning military counternarcotics aid and assistance, the Colombian military continued its modernization and professionalization efforts. The military, as an institution, preserved and enhanced its ideological and operational professionalism during this period by adhering to the principles of civilian authority and defending civilian-declared national interests. Increased civilian oversight was achieved, not only in the armed forces, but in the public forces as well. Although the road towards professionalization has been fruitful, several obstacles still persist. Corruption, induced by narcotraffic, and persisting (but outdated) ideological convictions leading to paramilitary activity, are the main sources of internal conflict in the modern Colombian military, but these issues tend to be more of a local or regional nature rather than encompassing the overall institution.

Conclusions

Mid-1990s and Beyond:

Prospects for the Military Institution

The modern Colombian military is a complex and dynamic organization. According to the Military Balance, the armed forces had 134,000 active duty personnel (40,400 conscripts) and 116,900 reserves in 1992. Approximately 80 percent of the total armed forces manning was comprised of Army personnel. Additionally, the National Police had 80,000 members, for a total of 214,000 members in the active duty security forces.[127] Total numbers can be deceiving when estimating the total force structure of the Colombian armed forces. The military created a series of "parallel support organizations," such as Civil Defense and the DAS, which were not covered by the same budgetary channels, but provided essential military support services. Additionally, the ambitious five-year plan, announced in 1993, calls for an increase in the number of combat troops by 30,000. Even though the total number of troops has been increasing throughout the years and a modernization plan has been initiated, cuts in military expenditures have also been evident. The Ministry of Defense

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[127]International Institute for Strategic Studies, The Military Balance, 1991-1992 (Oxford, Great Britain: Nuffield Press, 1991), pp. 193-194.

now utilizes about 9 percent of the national budget,[128] as opposed to 18 percent during the Barco administration, accounting for approximately 1.3 percent of the GDP.

All security forces (police and armed forces) are organizationally subordinate to the Ministry of Defense, which is directly responsible to the President. Under the Minister of Defense, the Commanding General of the Military Forces exercises command and control over the services--Army, Navy, Air Force--through their respective commanders, while the Director of the National Police exercises control of all police forces.

The military controls the production, distribution, and sale of arms within territorial boundaries through the Colombian military industrial complex. Besides its military hardware, installations, and equipment, the military also manages a private hospital, a university, and a series of hotels which can be used by private citizens in exchange of high fees.[129] Evidently, the Colombian armed forces have diversified their interests into other than purely military enterprises as a "natural" extension of their social and economic influence in Colombian society. This could create an overlap of spheres of influence between the military and

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[128]Vergara, Garrido, and Plazas, p. 11.

[129]Caicedo, pp. 245-246.

other government or private organizations.

Organizationally, the increases in the manning and budget, in addition to changes in the military strategy and doctrine, are indicative of a unique development of a domestic Manifest Destiny. By expanding the military's sphere of influence across the national territory, the government expects that other state institutions will follow, thus expanding state control in the previously "independent republics" and other undeveloped areas. Through an integrated plan, the Colombian state hopes to strategically consolidate power by expanding its industrial complex to both coasts, exploiting the vast national resources, and opening its infrastructure to previously ignored rural areas. Cutting narcotrafficking routes and guerrilla activity, primarily in the Eastern Plains, through increased mobility of combat troops (Mobile Brigades) and the establishment of riverine operations in these zones constitute basic national security goals. Operationally, doubts on the effectiveness of intelligence collections and analysis, obsolete communications systems, and the corrupting effects of narcotrafficking are prompting the military to take immediate action in response to increasing and previously unheard of public oversight.

The Colombian military has come to understand that, in the post-Cold War era, defense policy needs to be expanded to more than military policy. Following Janowitz's concepts, the

military has institutionalized civic-action after realizing that, as an "agent of social change," it can contribute to the national goals of integration and economic development while relying less on its coercive nature. At the same time, it can provide training and improve technical and administrative skills for its troops.[130]

Another military goal is to create a better public image, both domestically and internationally. Efforts to curtail paramilitary activity have been successful, but not complete. The existence of paramilitary armed groups, and the subsequent violations of human rights, constitute a threat to the institutional integrity of the military and a social threat to stability. Realizing this, the military is slowly eliminating its self-proclaimed immunity of the 1980s. But as in any well-established and complex bureaucracy, it is always difficult to completely eliminate certain practices outside the central command.

Despite repeated public accusations of abuses and incompetency by the media, the professional principle of respect for civilian authority is solidly institutionalized. Once out of active duty service, many military members are critical of the government or the system, yet the military institution is cohesive enough to control dissent among the

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[130]Janowitz, pp. 151-157.

ranks and to curtail involvement in politics. The concept of *civilismo*--respect towards civilian authorities--in and out of the military structure, may provide a logical explanation for the apolitical nature of the Colombian armed forces.[131] But as demonstrated in this study, the understanding of *civilismo* must be complemented by a more in-depth analysis of the military institution evolution, its doctrine, its attachment to the bipartite and constitutional system, and the resulting civil-military relations in order to comprehend the high level of corporate autonomy and the professional development of the Colombian military.

Colombian foreign policy has been greatly influenced by military policy during the past decade. The Colombian military has incrementally downplayed the external threats (Nicaragua, Venezuela, and international communism), while emphasizing that guerrillas are the institution's primary concern. This position has sometimes placed the Colombian government at odds with the U.S. Ambivalent U.S. positions dealing with counternarcotics policy, especially the historic emphasis on a military solution to the problem in source nations, have created friction between the two states. Yet, military-military contacts and cooperation have remained

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[131]Javier Sanim, preface to Jorge P. Osterling, Democracy in Colombia: Clientelist Politics and Guerrilla Warfare (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1989), p. xxi.

cordial and professional. Although Colombia is a major U.S. ally in the region, Colombian national security and foreign policy, fomented by the political elite, are acquiring an increasingly independent posture from the U.S. These policies are emphasizing autonomy in counternarcotics efforts and the continued support and commitment to international obligations and operations. Budgetary constraints constitute the limiting factor for this independent posture, as the security forces do not possess sufficient funds to fulfill long-term international obligations, lack adequate maintenance and operational resources, and are reliant on U.S. training, aid, and military assistance to accomplish these goals.

A central issue concerning the Colombian military concerns the threat assessment process. Threat perception and assessment by the national authorities and the military hierarchy was the single most contributing element affecting the organization and direction of the military institution. Changes in the government's perception of threats, as dictated by the executive, resulted in changes in the organizational structure, military thought, and overall strategy of the armed forces and other national security structures. The dynamic nature of the Colombian internal conflicts prompted successive administrations to evaluate each threat, and consequentially, the armed forces adapted to the new official positions. Modernization programs, creation of elite units, changes in

the military doctrine, institutionalization of civic-action programs, and other structural or organizational changes were, in some way or another, directly related to the prevailing threat perception by the central government.

In August, 1994, Ernesto Samper took the presidential oath among widespread public allegations of receiving vast amounts of campaign money from the Cali Cartel. Civilian oversight on issues concerning national security and defense, which were increased during the Barco and Gaviria administrations, are very likely to continue during the new administration. Samper continued Gaviria's initiative of appointing another civilian, Fernando Botero, as the new Minister of Defense. After three months in office, Botero has been able to effectively deal with various issues, and as his predecessor, Rafael Pardo Rueda, has a reputation of moral integrity and analytical preciseness.

As of to date, it is difficult to predict the precise direction of President Samper's national security policy. He has stated that the government must regain the ability to take control of the internal situation "by maintaining the active presence of the Armed Forces [throughout the national territory], modernizing them, increasing the number of troops, [increasing the number of career soldiers by] 50 percent, and

improving their efficiency."[132] These views do not represent any radical departure from Gaviria's policy, except for the increase of career soldiers. If implemented, this initiative will greatly increase the number of voluntary career soldiers in all units, as opposed to the current policy where only Mobile Brigades and counterguerrilla battalions possess this type of troops. In the same announcement, Samper criticized the ineffective national intelligence system and the corruption of entire systems and institutions such as police operations, hinting that radical changes in these areas may follow.[133]

Before taking office, Samper mentioned the possibility of establishing a dialogue with regional guerrilla commands. This announcement created concerns among military officers that establishing talks with regional commands, instead of the CGSB combined command, could create immense coordination problems and could lead to the amnesty of incarcerated members while avoiding a demobilization of active guerrillas.[134] The nature of Samper's comments, combined with the tumultuous

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[132]"Samper on National Security, Economic Issues," CROMOS (text in Spanish), 26 October 1993. Translated by Foreign Broadcast Information Service. FBIS Daily Report-Latin America, 12 November 1993 (PrEx 7.10: FBIS-LAT-93-217; p. 47).

[133]Ibid.

[134]"¿Vale la Pena Volver a Dialogar?" Semana, 26 July 1994, p. 26.

campaign allegations and changes in the top echelons of the National Police, have raised doubts domestically and abroad about Samper's reliability and commitment against narcotrafficking and his effectiveness in national security policy-making.[135]

Although his reputation has been questioned in Washington, Samper was able to bring the problem of narcoguerrilla to the attention of U.S. authorities. In a recent incident, helicopters carrying Minister Botero, high-ranking Colombian officers, U.S. Ambassador Myles Frenchette, and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Antinarcotics Matters Bryan Sheridan were attacked over a FARC-controlled cocaine producing area. This is the first time high-ranking U.S. officials have been able to witness such an action, and thus provides the most recent evidence of FARC involvement in the direct production and distribution of cocaine.[136] Although recognized by many military analysts, the involvement of guerrillas in drug production has been historically rejected by the U.S. government. This incident may change perceptions

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[135]Ibid. Also see "¿Qué Pasó en la Policía?" Semana, 13 September 1994, p. 28.

[136]See "¡Narcoguerrilla!" Semana, 27 September 1994, pp. 24-29.

in Washington,[137] and in this event, prospects for bilateral military relations remain excellent.

The Colombian armed forces constitute one of the most remarkable military forces in Latin America for their adherence to constitutional principles, respect for civilian authorities, and their renown expertise in counterinsurgency operations. Both in operational and institutional terms, the Colombian military is a professional force. This professionalism originally stemmed from the organizational formation, internal motivations, and ideological orientation of the institution, compounded by the lack of civilian involvement or interest in national security matters. As civilian involvement during the last eight years increased, the professionalization of the military shifted towards a more dynamic process in which internally and externally-imposed initiatives actively interacted in response to a fluid threat definition.

The military has been constantly redefining its role in a society which is full of contradictions and social inequalities, while at the same time fighting a 30-year war

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[137]U.S. aid and assistance to Colombia has been primarily designed to combat narcotrafficking. The U.S. government has opposed the use of U.S.-provided military hardware and equipment by Colombian security forces for other purposes such as counterinsurgency.

against a stubborn, yet increasingly unpopular and ideologically less cohesive guerrilla threat. While its history has been tainted by cases of abuse, paramilitary involvement, corruption, insubordination, and inefficiency, the military institution has been able to slowly gain the trust of the Colombian population. Professionalization of the military forces is necessary in order to preserve the integrity and effectiveness of the organization in face of the problems affecting the Colombian national life. Notwithstanding present conditions in the central government which may hinder civil-military relations in the short-term, the professionalization process of the armed forces and other national security structures is envisioned to continue in the foreseeable future.

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